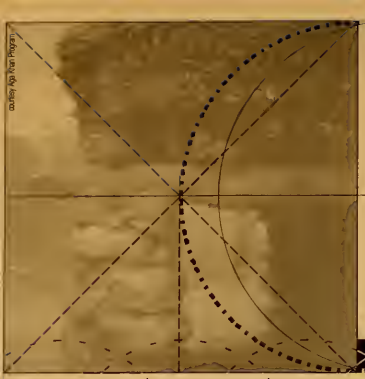

A VERBAL AND VISUAL FORUM FOR MINDS IN THE DEPT OF ARCHITECTURE

MIT

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THRESH

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The following articles discuss architectural constructs vis-a-vis philosophy. Their critique is directed at exposing the dynamics of the discourse between these two fields of knowledge, which is, in fact, an unilateral process by which philosophy is invoked as the parameters for architectural production

Nana Last explores the work of Nelson Goodman, a professor, emeritus at Harvard University. His work in aesthetics undertakes the development of a general theory of symbols. The symbol systems he considers range from the arts to the sciences, technology, perception and everyday practice. Here, his legitimation of a nonverbal symbol systems as a body of knowledge is discussed as paramount in architecture's search for its own set of standards

Ernest Pascucci criticizes Parc de la Villette by Bernard Tschumi, a hallmark of architectural appropriation of the post-structuralist mindset. He does not question the grounding of architectural production in philosophy. Rather, he elucidates the disparate criteria by which the park can be judged as a built form, as a media spectacle, and as an embodiment of the theories to which it aspires. Failing to acknowledge these separate contexts, he claims, may subvert the theoretical intent.

Foundationless Architecture by Nana D. Last

In *How Buildings Mean*, speaking of architectural judgments, Nelson Goodman notes that: "Not only is any search for a ready and conclusive test of rightness (for a key, no less, to all knowledge!) patently absurd, but even a pat and satisfying definition can hardly be expected. The particular determination of which works are right and which is wrong is no more the philosopher's responsibility than is the determination of which statements are true in a particular science or what are the facts of life. Those who are most concerned must apply and constantly develop their own procedures and sensibilities."

Implicitly, this statement is a response to the belief that philosophy forms a foundation for knowledge and judgment, not just for philosophy, but for all fields of inquiry, including the arts and sciences. The corollary to this is that architecture does not form its own foundation, but instead needs to turn to philosophy in order to define a set of standards of judgment and a foundation in knowledge. All of this raises the question of how is it that philosophy is understood to possess the self certainty that other fields of knowledge lack?

It was not until the nineteenth century that philosophy itself attained self certainty by recentering itself around epistemology, the study of the nature and derivation of knowledge. It thereby created an emphasis on how it is that we do know anything, a concern which came to be seen as a necessary predecessor to actually knowing anything, including the particular concerns of the sciences and arts. Philosophy's development into an autonomous discipline was thus rooted in the belief that the core of philosophy was just such a theory of knowledge. This reorientation around epistemology accomplished the separation of philosophy from the sciences by establishing philosophy as the foundation to the sciences and ultimately, sitting in judgment on them

Further reading:

- N. Goodman, *Languages of Art*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis and Cambridge, 1976
- N. Goodman, *Way of Worldmaking*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis and Cambridge, 1978
- "How Buildings Mean" is found in N. Goodman, and C. Elgin, *Reconceptions in Philosophy and Other Arts and Sciences*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis and Cambridge, 1988

4.01 First
critic William Hubbard

4.01 this past spring downplayed its previous emphasis on formal vocabularies in order to emphasize the feel of places and the making of them. The students began by experiencing places on campus by attending to the spatial feeling each of those places produced. The students were then shown slides of environments from architecture's history whose spatial feel could be seen as like that of one of the campus examples. In their first project, the students took

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Although Goodman continues this tradition of philosophy as centered on epistemology, the nature of that epistemology differs from the traditional legitimacy and foundation granting authority type of philosophy. This view resulted from a remaking of epistemology, a process that began for Goodman with his understanding that the functioning of symbol systems such as words or pictures, is fundamental to the "fabrication, application, and interpretation" of philosophy, art, science and everyday practice. Goodman concluded that much of philosophy was not equipped to handle many aspects of what actually composes knowledge, especially in

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nonverbal symbol systems, and thus worked to extend the idea of knowledge to nonverbal symbol systems by abolishing the notion of a predetermined standard of certainty to which knowledge should aspire. Without external absolute standards, rightness is understood as developing from within in response to particular situations rather than fixed and applied. It is a dynamic, pragmatic view where the principles follow from the current practice which is abstracted to form the principles and standards then used to critique the practice. That is, as particular judgements require particular standards and particular purposes, what is right in one instance may not be right in another, and such a determination cannot be made until it is tied to particular purposes that define right for what.

Ultimately, Goodman does not offer the kind of ready-made, a priori, standards looked to by many philosophers as well as architects; what he does offer, paradoxically, serves to place philosophy in the position of legitimizing non-verbal symbol systems, such as architecture. By his declaring non-verbal symbol systems capable of developing and expressing knowledge, Goodman simultaneously removes the need to search for a grounding in philosophy. Architecture, as a result, obtains self certainty through the understanding that standards are not applied and absolute but are created by and for particular purposes. Consequently, this allows architecture to see that it can and must develop its own standards from its own practice. They may arise from and relate to philosophy, but they are not grounded in it. And, more importantly, Goodman's point is that there are no other kinds of standards, absolute or otherwise, that all standards are similarly created and judged according to their fit with particular purposes■

Arrested Development: Parc de la Villette as Media Spectacle

by Ernest Pascucci

An urban park that, according to the guidelines set by the French government in a 1982 design competition, would reflect Parisian life at the fin du millénium, Parc de la Villette has been marketed in (increasingly overlapping) intellectual and architectural circles as a dystopic space rife with possibilities for those of a post-structuralist mindset. Bernard Tschumi's design dispenses with the notion of a master plan by superimposing three autonomous and often incongruous organizing systems. 1) points, a series of distorted bright red cubes called follies arranged on a Cartesian plane housing the various cultural institutions of the park, 2) lines, straight paths that traverse the park, the defunct Canal de l'Ourq, and the curving promenade cinématique, a walkway derived from the English Romantic garden and made to resemble an unwound reel of film, and 3) surfaces, a series of discrete gardens punctuated with "artistic interventions." According to the many proponents of deconstruction in general and Parc de la Villette in particular, it is this plurality of voices, of designs and designers, that challenges the notion of architectural authority. It is, moreover, in the overlap of the rational organizing systems that a liberating sense of disorder emerges. Visitors to the park, in the absence of a prescribed narrative, must fashion their own narrative from the various elements that are so loaded with references, and yet so emptied of meaning.

While this reading of La Villette as a post-structuralist dream come true is certainly seductive, we need to remain aware of who is trying to seduce us. La Villette had barely begun construction in the mid-eighties when this grand project for the northeastern part of Paris was surpassed, at least in the architectural academy, by its own publicity, a profusion of essays, analyses, and images housed in expensive over-sized books and periodicals featuring interchangeable interpretations that applaud La Villette's refusal of a preconceived narrative. Certainly the plan of La Villette, with its layering of different systems and architects' contribution, evokes Roland Barthes' idea of the death of the author. But the problem that arises, given this amount of media saturation, is that the author won't go away. Though deconstructivist architecture "went public" in the eighties, it has, curiously enough, remained private property of the academy, accessible only through the architectural press. La Villette is perhaps an architectural precedent in the era of late capitalism: a park that is designed, built, publicized, interpreted, and critiqued by the same six people.

The point of this critique is not to dispense with post-structuralist criticism and its provocative implications for architecture. Rather it is to take issue with the accelerated pace of the critical hype. Looking at the publicity process as a whole provides an invaluable critical perspective on La Villette. The avant-garde has, ironically, been true to its name in that its words of praise have been, for the most part, premature. It is too early to make grandiose claims that some critics have advanced for the daring new relationships between people and architecture that are set in motion at La Villette, especially when most words of praise preceded the actual construction of the park and furthermore lacked any sustained discussion of architectural forms. The sorts of interactions anticipated by critics so far in advance should not be substituted for the ways in which the public comes to know La Villette. The elements that figure so strongly in the drawings and critical writings (only rarely do publications print actual photographs of La Villette) are often so poorly executed that they go ignored by the undoctrinated visitors to the park. The promenade cinématique, which appears in bright red ink in Tschumi's infinitely reproduced drawings, is barely detectable and very difficult to follow in most places. The follies — which have been interpreted by critics as fake ruins of the failed project of Russian Constructivism, or alternatively (by those who have read their Bataille) as a reference, in their red color, to the blood of the animals that were slaughtered before the site was sanitized as a space of leisure for the cultural edification of the working classes — receive far less attention from those who visit the park than the dragon slides, the water fountains, the grassy open spaces, and the more accessible (and refreshingly banal) artistic interventions like Claes Oldenberg's giant bicycle that, except for a pedal, a handlebar, and part of a wheel, remains buried underground. Although there is much talk about people fashioning their own narratives at La Villette, the public has not been given much to work with. Fortunately, the park has grown far less austere with the addition of more artistic interventions. Oldenberg's buried bicycle may be a surrealist one-liner, but distractions like this provide a temporary sense of orientation that enhances the experience of post-industrial wakefulness that the follies and the promenade alone cannot provide.

It should not be forgotten that La Villette is part of a larger process of de-industrialization in the

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Udergraduate Foundation

xeroxed plans of the historical examples, distorted them graphically, combined the distorted plans and then extruded them upward in model form, thus creating a space that engendered a feeling like that of the historical example it was based upon. In the next project, the students combined their first composition of spaces with a second project— a landscape designed along "continuous form" principles. For example, the curved wall of Aalto's Seynatsalo library ("a feeling of being up against a border") met a retaining-wall of homasote "masonry." The curve becomes jogs, but the "border" feeling remains. The final project gave the students their first chance to postulate the feeling they wished a place to have and then to invent a shape that would engender that feeling. The vehicle for this effort was a wilderness outpost for a park ranger in one of five National Park-like sites. In order to invoke a given feeling, the students focused on the creation of places centered upon scale pieces of furniture, a work/dining table, its chair, a futon, a lounge chair, a toilet, and a sink.

PAGE THREE

The past year has been one of tumultuous self-examination, of re-appraisal, of setting of agendas. Urgency pervades. As the discipline of architecture gropes to establish its scope, validity, and collective memory - so too does the MIT department of architecture, which seems at points, in the interest of keeping an open mind, to veer towards the autocracy of pluralism. The impact of this critical introspection on the content of the spring semester studios was profound. Perhaps the sole consistency throughout all of the studio offerings was the assumption that a particular method, and a vigorous adherence thereto, is a trustworthy agent for achieving good architectural results. In other words, design is deemed to be a process, not an event. However, whether the process be place-making, transformational xerography and misreading, resistance to program, phenomenological expression, holistic "supports", or flatout sooo-political or programmatic problem solving, each studio seemed, in the most fundamental sense, to actively avoid consensus or a department-wide ethos. There was, nonetheless, a common denominator, often made explicit, which served as a standard by which to compare these approaches, namely, the autonomy of architecture. Can a building or a drawing be about architecture as a formal and intellectual construct unto itself? The following descriptions of introductory through intermediate (4.01 - Level 2) design studios offered last spring offer a range of responses to this proposition. A synthetic, collective response might endorse a semi-autonomous architecture.

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4.04 Second Undergraduate Foundation

critic Fernando Domeyko

This studio was composed of various exercises intended to strengthen the students' understanding of the built environment through making and drawing. The process entailed the manipulation of real building materials to gain an understanding of basic material properties, how they affect physical and sensory experience, and how these understandings can be communicated and explored through drawing. The students deployed concrete and glass block, channels, pools, columns and canvas to explore: basic perceptual concepts of point, line and plane; physical properties of tension and compression; and ideas of space, light and habitation. The installations were recorded in hardline plans, sections, elevations and axonometrics, as well as through more immediate and expressive charcoal and pencil drawings describing light, weight, tectonics, movement, and space. These studies were compared, in terms of scale, construction and impact, to existing examples within the city and landscape. The process culminated in a design, on the part of each student, for a transformation of the installation area. Here, the students synthesized their drawing and making skills to best convey intended relationships and properties.

Andrew Cameron

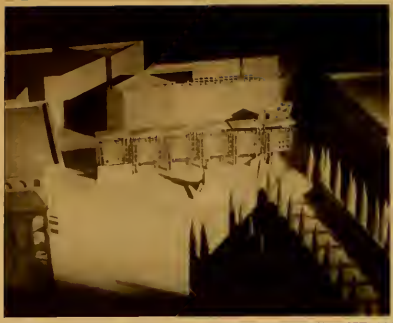
House as Institution

critic Shayne O'Neil

This studio had two inter-related objectives: first, to discuss some contemporary architectural problems focusing on the notion of the modern suburban house, and second, to produce a series of architecturally improved or perhaps merely reformulated versions of certain currently recognized 'house' configurations. Since the context for these investigations was the suburban subdivision, not only was the house's own internal organization analyzed, but so also was its external relationship to other more conventional house configurations adjoining each house site. The studio assumed, that among other concerns, considerations of place, material, tectonic expression and qualities of space have a representational role related analogously to extra-architectural topics, such as issues of family structure, gender relations, interiority and privacy. The responsibility of the designer was therefore to analyze these values, adopt a critical attitude about them and most importantly, to find spatial forms consistent with those attitudes. The studio investigated these single house studies in a generic context familiar to most, the suburban house subdivision. The assumption of this investigation was that the suburban ideal presents a paradox: a mass market's need for individuality linked to an urban population's wish to re-create the small town. The question therefore which each member of the studio confronted was how in a building circumstance defined by repetition, standardization and the production of the seemingly unique, can the house find authentic expression? To varying degrees, this question challenged each individual to adopt design strategies which examined and even intensified the qualities of semblance, a spatial repetition which we now assume to be inescapable features of the contemporary house and suburbia. The overall intent of the studio was not to invent the future house, but rather, to rethink the present house in an otherwise difficult contemporary setting. The design exercises in the course consisted of an analysis of the Canonic, both 'high' and 'low', the critique of those configurations, both culturally and architecturally, and finally, the misreading or transformation of those canonic examples.

DESIGN as

DESIGN STUDIOS SPRING 92



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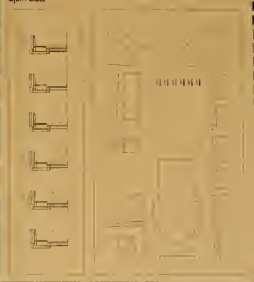


LEVEL 2 CLOSURE TO THE PIAZZA DEL DUOMO IN MILAN

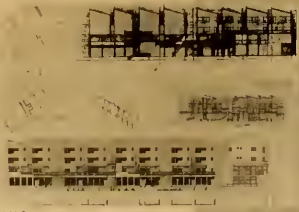
critic Wellington Reiter

The problem posed in the Milan studio was, on its surface, quite simple and direct— "provide closure on the fourth or 'open' end of the Piazza del Duomo," the most important public arena in the city and its geographic center. It soon became clear that this was not so, as proposals raised fundamental questions about the site and its potentials, such as redundancy due to the fact that the buildings on the western end of the site already provide a terminus to the space. As a result, the definition of "closure" in this context became paramount. Further, the proximity of the cathedral and Galleria (religion and commerce) yielded a tenuous circumstance for building. Nothing about the Piazza is consistent, particularly its architecture, which includes Gothic, neo-classic and fascist samplings. Finally, the location of the allowable building site demanded a free-standing intervention in the midst of a fairly formal arrangement of existing pieces. These conditions, combined with urbanistic and cultural considerations, intensified the importance of the selection or invention of a program to coincide with the physical intervention. What type of use could prove worthy of placement in such a highly charged location? The site seemed actively to resist an addition in the same way a body rejects a transplanted organ. The question of whether architecture itself can be a program prompted investigations into permanence, monumentality, serenity, materiality and public art. Ultimately, the studio placed great stock in the ability of architecture to shape the city

COMPLEXITY VS. CHAOS : STUDIES IN HOUSING

critic Renee Chow

The intention of the studio was to introduce and explore the design issues in multi-family housing which reflect the complexity of a variety of individuals living within a shared, cohesive, and recognizable neighborhood. Each student developed a set of design tools and approaches which could deal either simultaneously or iteratively with the many levels of intervention in housing ranging from room to neighborhood. The semester was organized in two parts: the first consisted of three exercises in dwelling, neighborhood and light wood-frame construction and their influence on the form of housing. The second part of the semester synthesized the learning from the previous exercises using a competition sponsored by the ACSA/ American Wood Council for housing in Mission Bay, San Francisco



Leah McGavern

LEVEL 1 MIT OUTING CLUB RETREAT

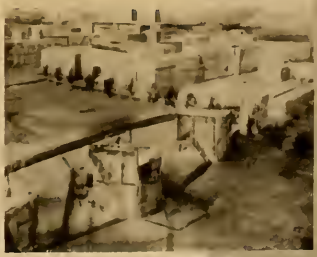
critic Jan Wampler

This studio undertook the design of a new retreat for the MIT Outing Club in Intervale, New Hampshire to replace one that was lost to a fire in the fall of 1991. The design process was geared toward encouraging a harmonious relationship between the form of the building and its natural surroundings. Further, the client was concerned with achieving an environmentally sensitive design through the use of solar and other conservational technologies, as well as comfortable sleeping accomodations for one to sixty five individuals, a kitchen, and extensive porch and deck space. Les Norford and Jim Axley of the Building Technology group assisted in the development of passive solar and structural strategies, while woodworker Chris Dewart introduced constructional options which were pursued through the assembly of a full scale details by each student. On the basis of their design work during the semester, which was subject to input and review by representatives of the Outing Club, as well as by design faculty and others, three students, Barbara Brady, Taylor Gaylean and David DeSola, in collaboration with Len Morse-Fortier, Les Norford, and Jan Wampler, developed a design for the retreat which is scheduled for construction later this fall.

Barbara Brady

4

Gerhardt Brandt & Fred Swoboda



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NUMBER 4

Next month, Thresholds will feature articles which discuss issues within the East-West discourse. The following article, taken from the SMArchS thesis by Imran Ahmed which was recognized as the best written last spring, engages this discourse.

The Journey from New Delhi To Islamabad

Dependence and Subversion in the Ambivalent Expression of Nationhood

According to Gayatri Spivak, imperialism requires a rereading "not because Empire is abstract, but because Empire messes with identity." National liberation movements in the last half of this century have tried to advance their status and define a sense of national identity through cultural production. The projection of a national identity implies a refurbishing of the past by both reinventing traditions and by setting up institutions of state. By giving these institutions a physical presence, architecture legitimizes the notion of a defined nationhood through an act of naturalization. Public architecture and urbanism as forms of cultural production are instrumental in the suppression of contradictions and the substitution of coherence— a process essential to a homogenous formation of identity. In this process, objects and events, monuments and ceremonies, all contribute meaningful symbols to the consolidation of the "we". Capital cities as signifiers of a projected national identity thus assume the role of a cultural symbol.

The independent nation status attained by much of the developing world in the last fifty years can be taken as a change in consciousness breaking with the past is inextricably linked with the sense that tradition has been dismembered. This has led to a crystallization of memory at the particular moment of independence, and an effort to embody that memory within a sense of historical continuity. Effacement of identity, which was once the only means of survival for the colonized, has been replaced by the legitimation of a new identity. The return to a previously denied heritage requires a reinvention of traditions which project an apparent coherence. Public architecture, as a form of cultural production, allows the suppression of inherent contradictions within the constitution of a nation. This centers on architecture and urbanism a function typically assumed by ideology.

New Delhi - "The King's Godchild"- in its epitomic narrativization of colonialism foreshadows the narrative mechanisms of post-colonial Islamabad - "The City of Islam"-the capital city of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. In Islamabad, the ideological agenda and its vitalizing narrative in architecture and urbanism has two roots: the urge to Westernization, where nationhood with its ostensibly colonial origins is taken as the sign of modernity and progress, and a will to fundamentalism, where the religious community of Islam is the original

Claims, Roles, and Responsibilities. by Daniel Gorini

-The discipline of design plays a significant role in the shaping of social conditions.
-Like art, the discipline of design is a reflective, analytical, and self referential field. It can react to - and allow us to contemplate- social conditions but does little to shape them.

Which of the above declarations is closer to the truth? Is the first axiomatic or is it a self ingratiating fallacy? Is the second correct or is it simply a ducking of responsibilities? The answer probably lies somewhere in between. However, which side one leans toward has significant implications both for design and for design education.

Among the presentations of studios on Sept.10 were some that explicitly indicated social concern as integral to their intent. Yet the specific direction of this concern seemed, at times, less than clear. Recent urban problems and strife were mentioned as inspiration. However, the description of proposed studio methods did not always address the thorny issues raised by these references. An artist's claims of inspiration do not necessarily indicate the content of the work. Is this standard acceptable for architecture? It seems to me that our claims may carry a deeper set of attendant responsibilities.

Placing design and design education in this context brings to light one of the most salient questions facing our field today: What exactly is the role and responsibility of architecture in shaping society? The power, and often beauty, of architectural design in the service of capitalism and of the state is obvious and predominant. Is the discipline of design - in this case I wish to distinguish design as a core discipline within the broader field of architecture - capable of aiding a struggle against the polarization of wealth, and against segregation by class and race? Can architects, without pretense, offer some aid in the continuous struggle for self-determination and sustainable existence? If so, how?

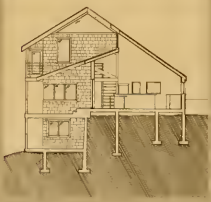
We cannot simply follow the mistaken construct that tells us that architects, planners and bureaucrats can salve social wounds by designing pleasant "cultured" environments. As Rosalyn Deutsche points out in a recent essay, this vision fails to understand that the city is a social rather than a technological phenomenon. When social claims are made we must rigorously examine the intent, content, and potential results of our work. Our design method must then be informed by that examination.

When the stated intent of architectural education is to foster a critical understanding of form and design we are in one realm. We learn to assess the formal and structural organization of the built environment. We apply that understanding to study the nature of access, of privacies, and of public zones. We learn the use of design and building method. We study the form of the city and the nature of "place". In short, these didactics seek to help us stake out foundations for the manifold discipline of design.

When, however, we address the social role and responsibility of architecture - and I think we must - we have entered another realm. It is a realm which involves another set of critical issues and understandings and it must be approached with the same rigor applied to the study of form. There are those who will choose not to wade into this swamp. I presume that is their right. For those who do, however, there are some tough questions. Central among these is this. How much should we really expect of form making?

Consider for a moment Rosemary Grimshaw's stated studio intent. "Urban reconciliation through the making of place." This for me presents a semantic dilemma. Does "the making of place" refer to an articulation of form - which in itself would be a valid premise for a studio - ? If it does then it could hardly be expected to achieve "urban reconciliation". Perhaps "place" instead refers to a cultural artifact of the city. If this is the case then it

Preliminary Design
Barbara Brady
David DeSola



LEVEL 2 A TOWN CENTER FOR LUBLIN, POLAND

critic John Myer

This studio, the second one to address this project, undertook the design of a center for an existing Russian-style housing cooperative in Lublin, Poland, and had the enormous benefit of visiting the site and its environs at mid-semester to present schemes and receive criticism from local professionals and the City Council. The town center, intended to benefit vastly the residents of this barren living environment by providing residential commercial, cultural and institutional uses at a variety of scales, provided a valuable working model in which to test approaches to urban design in the difficult circumstance of post-communist redevelopment of the former East Bloc. The courtyard block and its incremental growth pattern, as found in Lublin's medieval center, served as a departure point for the exploration of a suitable form for the center. Implicit in the explorations were issues including: communal form and the clustering of buildings, distributive frameworks, such as those controlling vehicular and pedestrian movement, configuration of public vs. private space and the figure-ground character of that relationship, the form of the public space itself, and the architecture of a particular building in this context including program, organization, construction, precedent, and external form. The complexity of the current situation and the notion of the Socialist era as an open-ended condition, forced a careful consideration of the issue of Modernism and its impact on construction methods through socio-political content and architectural meaning.

and omniscient source of Pakistani identity. Such a mapping, however, is nervously conscious of its own omissions, of its unwillingness to address the most intriguing aspects of a Pakistani identity, the incongruities that surround the inception of Pakistan. Here, Islamabad's architecture and urbanism evoke their strongest sense of identity crisis: caught between modernist architecture and the reliance on an inherited colonial institutional and urban program. The narrative of national identity, as manifest in the architecture and urbanism, acknowledges both Westernization and fundamentalism in succession.

Sara Suleri has written: "If English India can serve as a discursive model of any interpretive resonance, then it must illustrate a disbanding of the most enduring binarism that perplexes colonial cultural studies: it must provide an alternative to the assignation of 'cultures' to colonialism, of 'nation' to post-colonialism". The sorry incongruity of the two terms evokes the post-colonial presence of the socio-spatial idiom of Imperial British India within the contemporary situation, this is the transitional social reality of post-colonial "modernity" as manifest in the architecture and urbanism of Islamabad. ■

CALENDAR

Wed Oct 14
GSD Lecture Series
Dusin Ogrin
6:00 p.m Piper Auditorium

Wed October 21
HTC Forum
Anne Higonnet
"At Home with History. House Museums 1848-1940"
5:30 p.m. Rm. 5-216

GSD Lecture Series
Kazuo Shinohara
6:00 p.m. Piper Auditorium

Tue October 27
Environmental Design Forum
Prof. Karen Franck
"Housing: Deconstructing/Reconstructing Type"
5:30 p.m. Rm. 10-485 (refreshments)

Wed November 4
HTC Forum
Helen Lipstadt & Harvey Mendelson
"Techno-idolatry"
5 30 p.m. Rm. 5-216

GSD Lecture Series
Frank O. Gehry
6.00 p.m. Piper Auditorium

Wed November 11
GSD Lecture Series
Sverre Fehn
6:00 p.m. Piper Auditorium

cannot be achieved through design alone. This brand of "place" is "made" only through the collective expression of people over time.

Consider also Grimshaw's reference to the recent riots in L.A. This present for me a moral dilemma. Blood and fire in the street can be a powerful call for action. However, it seems inconsistent to invoke such imagery when the proposed studio method makes no further reference to the urban poor.

In her lecture last year at MIT, Mary Mcleod staked out a distinctly political position, however she cautioned against making grandiose claims for our design actions. In response to a question she referred to a commitment to "do the right thing". As an example, consider Herman Hertzberger's Functionality, Flexibility, and Polyvalence, in which he calls for structure and form which are specific - rather than neutral - yet provide for multiplicity and transformability of use. Such work could be seen as inherently democratic. In this thinking the expression of an architect's specific vision is not seen as a finished product. Instead it is seen as an incident in the larger social dynamic of the city. The building is an artifact not an artwork. The architect's contribution is social rather than personal.

As designers we must understand that all actions are in some way political. Each action must be considered not as a vehicle for political manifestation but rather in light of the questions: "Who really benefits?" and "Who is affected?" Is this enough? Is it more than we should be expected to worry about? Wherever we place ourselves in this debate, let us acknowledge the responsibility to apply rigorous critical assessment to the formulation of our positions. ■

Lecture Series Fall 1992

Sept. 15
Arnold Schurer
Technical University Braunschweig
"Japanese and German Design Compared"

Sept. 29
William Mitchell
MIT
"The reconfigured Eye: Digital Images and the Construction of Place"

Oct. 20
Charles Correa
Architect, Bombay; MIT
"The Shifting Paradigm"

Oct. 27
Krzysztof Wodiczko
MIT
"After Public Art"

Nov. 3
Alex Tzonis/Liane Lefaivre
Technical University Delft
"Architectural Knowledge"

Nov. 17
Maristela Casciato
University of Rome
"Hygiene and Domestic Order: Toward a History of the Italian House in the Twentieth Century"

Dec. 1
Marc Treib
University of California Berkeley
"Axioms for a Modern Landscape Architecture"

All events are on Tuesdays at 6:30 pm, in MIT Room 10-250.
Open and free to the public.
Room 10-250 is reached from 77 Massachusetts Avenue

● Paul Robertson, formerly a grad ute students in the History, Theory and Criticism group and long an associate in William Stout's exceptional architectural bookstore in San Francisco, has opened a similar store in Harvard Square **Cambridge Architectural Books, Inc.** is located at 12 Bow Street (above the Cafe Pamplona.)

● John Seitz SMArchS '92, Kurt Levens SMBT '92, March '95 and Debbie Gage W '92 received an Honorable Mention in the International **AIAS Green Architecture Competition** "One Earth One Choice." This year's competition was for the design of a new National Energy Management Institute

NOTES:

(**Arrested Development**, cont.)

outskirts of Paris and the environs. The park is one of many that have been built in the past decade on the sites of defunct slaughterhouses, warehouses, and mine shafts. Certainly in contrast to the new quarter of La Défense in Neuilly, which in its promotional literature happily proclaims that this stunning office complex was but a squalid group of hovels fifteen years ago, and the recently opened Euro Disney in Marne-la-Vallée, which has gone out of its way to emphasize the French folk origins of Disney's fakelore, La Villette seems the most self-conscious about these issues of displacement. Still, does an exploited nineteenth century working class need an apology a century too late? — especially when the symbolism the folies is too abstruse to register on most visitors to the park. This unwillingness on Tschumi's part to make a social commentary that is accessible to a wider audience may reveal that he is less interested in the Bataille's ideas regarding the regimentation of social space than he is in proving to other intellectuals that he has read Bataille. In instances such as this one, critical theory in the hands of architects risks reification and even recuperation when the architect fails to distinguish the different contexts in which the theory and the architecture are produced. It terms imported from other disciplines ("multiplicity," "plurality," and "difference") are to become anything to architects than mere buzz words, then projects like Hans Haacke's competition entry for the gardens of the Assemblée Nationale — in which the words Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité printed in Arabic were superimposed on a map of France to show that this promise has not yet been fulfilled for an entire ethnic group in the country — would resonate in a contemporary context far more responsibly than the folies at La Villette. More credible, too, is the Maison La Villette, located in a Ledoux building in one corner of the park. An archive documenting everyday and working class life in the northeast quarters of Paris, the Maison La Villette demonstrates a commitment to a segment of Parisian history that is otherwise being forgotten or aestheticized. Still, given the fact that fifteen years ago the site of La Villette was slated to be a large-scale housing project, those who promoted the grand projet— Mitterand, the French government, Tschumi, and the many designers and artists who participated— should not fail to see their role in this process of displacement. ■

Further Reading

● Anthony Vidler, "Trick Track" in *AA Files* 12, Summer 1986
● Louis Marin, "Transpositions: On the Intellectual origins of Tschumi's architectural theory" in *Assemblage* 11, MIT Press, April 1990
● Mary McLeod, "Architecture and Politics in the Reagan Era: from postmodernism to deconstructivism" in *Assemblage* 8, Feb 1989